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We must treat all people with love, as God and Jesus do

Thomas Gumbleton | Jul. 5, 2012 The Peace Pulpit

In order to give a little bit more context to a reflection on our scripture passages of today, I will share with you one other very short passage from the first letter of St. John, a passage with which we're all familiar. John tells us, "My dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God because God is love. The one who lives in love, lives in God and God lives in them."
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I'm sure we are all very familiar with that passage, and we've heard that description of God many times: God is love. If you live in love, you live in God. That's what our scripture lessons are telling us today. Our first lesson from the Book of Wisdom reminds us that we wouldn't even exist if it were not for God's love. God is love, and God loves us into existence. God did not make death, the writer tells us, nor does God rejoice in the destruction of the living since God has created everything.

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24
Psalms 30:2, 4, 5-6, 11, 12, 13
2 Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13-15
Mark 5:21-43
Full text of the readings [1]

All creatures of the universe are for our good. We don't think about that often enough. We must remember and become aware of that: We wouldn't be here now. We wouldn't exist for one second if God's love didn't draw us into being and continue to support us at every second, every instance of our lives. God is love, and that love is poured forth upon us. In the Gospel lesson, we see even more dramatically how God is love because Jesus -- we know this now so clearly because it's 2,000 years later -- Jesus died and rose from the dead and lives among us.

So we know Jesus as the love of God in a very clear way, but it was just beginning to be made clear to people then that God is love. Jesus is being revealed as the Son of God. As soon as someone comes to Jesus in need, look how quickly he stops what he is doing. He says, "Of course, I will come. If your child is ill, I will come and be with you. I will touch her and enable her to be alive." Jesus sets off to do that right away.

Then as you see in this Gospel lesson, he's interrupted, and immediately he stops to turn to the person who is in need of him at that moment. Jesus is always so quick to reach out, to respond in love, to respond to the needs of anyone. That's always the most important thing in the life of Jesus. He had a schedule, I suppose, when he landed on that shore after his trip across the lake. He was probably deciding what he was going to do, but someone needed him. Because God is love, and that love is in Jesus, that person who needs him becomes the most important thing in what he's going to do, or what's on his agenda.

Also, I think in this Gospel lesson, we see the love of God in Jesus in a very concrete way. It's a beautiful example of what it really means to love. The woman wanted to touch Jesus and be healed anonymously. I presume -- and it comes later in the Gospel, when she comes before Jesus and she's trembling -- she's afraid. She wanted not to be seen by Jesus because she was making Jesus ritually unclean. To be touched by her would make Jesus not eligible to go to the temple and to worship God there.

So she was afraid, and Jesus, of course, could have let it happen that way, but I think it's a very important mark of how Jesus loves in a very human way as well as being the love of God, because he wants to recognize that

person. He wants to see who she is and respect her as a full human being, and reassure her with his own words: "Your faith has healed you." To Jesus, it's never impersonal. I think sometimes when we're asked to help out in some situations, it seems quite easy to write a check, doesn't it, instead of going where the poor are and serving them face to face.

We can let them be anonymous, but that's not the way Jesus was. His love was very human, very real, and he wanted everyone to experience that love in a personal way, to interact with him. That love of God in Jesus is still present in our world. It doesn't take a lot of imagination or a lot of effort on our part to think about where the love of God is needed, where people need to be seen, to be recognized, to be touched, to be made whole.

Sometimes you hear it said, "What would Jesus do?" People ask that question in light of the great needs that are all around us. I think that's the wrong question. Because Jesus is present in our world, we should ask, "What is Jesus doing?" Most of all, we have to ask that about ourselves. What is Jesus doing through me to assist the people who are in such terrible need in our country and throughout the world? Think mostly of our own country right now.

Some time ago, there was an article that I read and kept because it's so poignant. It describes a woman in Los Angeles; Carol Ann Reyes is her name. She lives in Los Angeles, suffers from dementia and is homeless. Somehow, she made her way to a hospital with serious, untreated needs. No details were provided as to what happened to her except that the hospital called a cab and sent her back to Skid Row. True, they phoned ahead to workers at a rescue shelter to let them know she was coming, but some hours later, a surveillance camera picked her up wandering around the streets in a hospital gown and slippers.

The writer of the article remarks, "Dumped in America." That woman is a clear example of what is happening to tens of millions of people in our country. We thank God this week. We have a law now that is going to allow many, many more of them to have the insurance that will make it possible for them to be taken into a hospital and get them the treatment and care that they need, but it isn't over yet. There are those who want to repeal the law, and there are parts of the law that still need to be fulfilled.

The Medicaid increases for the states are part of the law, but the states have to accept them. At least four or five states have already said no. They would rather not take the money from the government and let people be ill without treatment, to be dumped on the streets. Could that happen in our state? I think it probably isn't part of our governor's plan. We have to be very alert to it, and we have to be very careful that in other parts of our country the poor do not continue to be turned away.

There is so much we can do if we really focus our attention and make the efforts to do it. Jesus is alive, and he lives in us. If we don't reach out and bring the healing power of Jesus where it's needed, Jesus' work cannot be done. So it's truly up to us to make sure that we continue to act as Jesus does in today's Gospel, by reaching out to help those who are ill, not only through the law that now makes it possible to have insurance, but reaching out in a loving, healing way to people around us in our families, our neighborhoods, and also to reach out to the poor who are hungry, who need food.

I'm sure there isn't any one of us, if you travel around the streets of Detroit, who doesn't notice more and more poor people on the street corners with signs that say, "I'm hungry. I have nothing to eat." Do we just walk by or drive by them without stopping? Are we like Jesus, ready to change our agenda for the moment and reach out to help? I'm sure that I could continue to ask these kinds of questions for myself and for all of us, but it is a hot day and I won't go on any longer.

I will suggest that if we want to have encouragement to try to imitate Jesus more fully and to really make sure that that love that he demonstrates -- that God is love and that that loves lives among us -- that Jesus demonstrates so beautifully in the Gospel, that we want to make sure that goes on, we can be confident that if

we reach out and bring Jesus into the world in which we live, marvelous things will happen.

This is what St. Paul says about what happened when he took up that collection for the poor: "They will give thanks because you obey the requirements of Jesus' Gospel, and share generously with them and with all. They shall pray to God for you and feel affection for you because the grace of God overflows in you." Yes, thanks be to God for God's indescribable gift of love. Thanks be to God for that gift of love, and thanks be to God that we commit ourselves to live the love of Jesus and can bring that love into our world today.

[Homily given at St. Leo Parish, Detroit. The transcripts of Bishop Gumbleton's homilies are posted weekly to NCRonline.org. **Sign up here** [2] to receive an email alert when the latest homily is posted.]

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